

Development of the Anne Sullivan Macy Service for Deaf-Blind Persons

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FROM 1956 TO 1958, WITH THE assistance of a grant from the United States Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Industrial Home for the Blind conducted a study of deaf-blind persons. Although the project eventuated in a mass of relevant data, one general conclusion stood out. Regardless of the aspect of the problem studied or the discipline involved, it was observed that deaf-blind persons could benefit from rehabilitation services provided under a specialized program. The IHB Study Report closed with the recommendation that other programs for the deaf-blind should be established throughout the United States to replicate the IHB experience, and to provide services in

those geographical areas where none existed.

Since that time, although attitudes have been changing considerably, services for deaf-blind persons have remained comparatively static. In addition to the barriers of lack of information about the experience with deaf-blind persons, lack of faith in their capacities, and lack of financial and attitudinal readiness to serve them, agencies for the blind have been confronted by the problems of numbers. Actually, even urban communities are likely to find themselves with small numbers of deaf-blind individuals needing service. Thus, the IHB, with the largest of such populations, still has fewer than one hundred deaf-blind persons on its active register. Confronted by such small population parameters, local and state agencies have felt reluctant to enter into extensive programs on their behalf.

On June 1, 1962, the Industrial Home for the Blind, assisted by a demonstration

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and research grant from OVR, began an attempt to narrow the service gap which currently separates many deaf-blind persons from needed rehabilitation services. On one side of the gap is our current state of professional knowledge which has already demonstrated that deaf-blind persons can benefit from adequate services. On the other side of the gap is the deaf-blind individual who is physically isolated from the source of such services. The IHB approach is one which, hopefully, will bring the client and the essential services together, providing unprecedented opportunities for deaf-blind persons to achieve rehabilitation goals.

Traditionally, with the exception of some efforts on a countywide basis, services to blind and deaf-blind persons have been conducted on national, state, and local levels, notably, by the American Foundation for the Blind and the U. S. Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. National agencies have assumed consultative, research, and coordinating roles. State and local agencies have provided direct service to individuals. Yet, neither the national agencies, on the one hand, nor the local and state agencies, on the other, have constituted the most favorable instruments of service in certain areas. One of these has been the rehabilitation of deaf-blind persons. The difficulties have not been with the agencies, but with the special problems of the deaf-blind population.

In an attempt to overcome the barriers that separate the deaf-blind person from the assistance he needs, the IHB is organizing its new project on a regional basis. With the support and cooperation of national, state, and local agencies, the project, to be known as The Anne Sullivan Macy Service for Deaf-Blind Persons, will serve deaf-blind persons residing in some fifteen states from Maine to North Carolina. These services, including case-finding, intake and diagnosis, evaluation, training in self-care, communication, and mobility, personal adjustment training, vocational counseling, social casework, rehabilitation

training, placement in industry and sheltered workshops, group work and recreation, follow-up, research, and community organization, will be offered by the Industrial Home for the Blind, in cooperation with state and local welfare and rehabilitation agencies.

The proposal contains a number of important features that characterize the new program:

1. Organization of the Region

All states in the region selected for service will be invited to participate in the regional program. Conferences with state directors and other state and local agency personnel have already been held and others will follow. Basically, the special problems in each state are recognized and, therefore, services to the deaf-blind residents of each state will be keyed to the conditions existing therein. After a series of conferences with the states interested in cooperating with the regional program, guidelines will be laid down for referral, the roles of the participating agencies, and the means through which state and local services may be most effectively tied into the total program for deaf-blind persons.

The IHB team will enter a state only at the invitation of state and local agencies. While there, the team will assist the state and its localities to identify and to initially screen deaf-blind persons residing in that state who may benefit from project services. Each state will make referrals to the IHB program in the light of its own policies and experiences as well, with consideration of the recommendations of IHB specialists in service to deaf-blind persons. In making the referral, the state will submit to the IHB the medical, psychological, social, and vocational data needed to properly evaluate the readiness of a deaf-blind client for admission to the regional service.

2. Organization of the Community

Although it is recognized that some deaf-blind persons may need to continue

functioning in a special environment over the long run, efforts will be made in every case to prepare the individual for return to his home town where he may participate in the ongoing life of that community. To this end, in cooperation with the referring agency, the IHB will make a careful study of the deaf-blind person's community before he is transported to New York City for project services. One or more IHB staff members will enter the community, help study its resources, and confer with its leaders. Through this technique, it is hoped that all segments of the community can be made interested in the deaf-blind person and encouraged to plan for his eventual return. Thus, by means of community education, the project plans to pave the way for the successful resettlement of many deaf-blind persons. It is expected that project efforts will improve the community's receptivity and readiness to accept the deaf-blind person and will improve the deaf-blind person's capacity to benefit from what his community can offer.

When the deaf-blind person completes his rehabilitation program at the regional center and demonstrates his readiness for return to the community, an IHB team, with the help of the referring agency, will pave the way for his resettlement through interpreting the deaf-blind person to the community, through organizing local services for him, and through providing direct counseling service to the family and the community during the early days of his re-entry. For example, if a deaf-blind rehabilitant, returning to his community, is capable of functioning in employment, IHB staff members, cooperating with state and local counselors, will assist him to find a suitable placement and to make an adequate initial adjustment to the work situation. In this instance, as in all others, the goal of the IHB project is to preserve state and local interest in, and responsibility for, the deaf-blind person, thus promoting opportunities for him to live in the community of his choice.

3. Training

Effective state and local cooperation with the project will be aided by the presence in a state or a community of one or more key professional individuals especially interested and skilled in working with deaf-blind persons. Currently, the lack of training facilities and the lack of experience in working with this population has limited to a handful the number of professional persons capable of serving deaf-blind individuals. The IHB project will attack this problem on two fronts:

a) At the request of a state or local agency, IHB personnel will provide orientation and, if necessary, more intensive training in services to deaf-blind persons to the staff members of state and local agencies.

b) At the rate of one a year, the IHB will provide intensive training to professional persons who are likely to take leadership in their own areas of the United States in providing regional services to deaf-blind persons. Such trainees will be referred to the program by agencies contemplating the establishment of services in their own regions and needing special training for one of their staff members to implement these plans.

4. Reduction of Isolation

The first IHB study of deaf-blindness confirmed the belief that deaf-blind persons need specialized and differentiated services. Simultaneously, however, it was also found that they could benefit from many services available to blind clients with normal hearing. For example, no need was discovered for special facilities for evaluating and training deaf-blind clients. With the assistance of consultant staff members specializing in service to deaf-blind persons, the regular IHB staff was found to be capable of working with deaf-blind clients in a rehabilitation center. As might be expected, the regular staff members needed orientation to the problems of deaf-blind persons and train-

ing in communication, but once this was done, the barriers to serving the deaf-blind individual in the general agency setting began to melt away.

The IHB has committed itself to the reduction of isolation among the deaf-blind, wherever possible. By mingling with others, the deaf-blind person's personal, social, and vocational development can be accelerated. Rather than limiting the deaf-blind person to the society of other deaf-blind persons and a few specialized professional workers, the IHB plans to broaden his horizons through widening his social contacts and teaching him to live with blind and seeing persons who are not aurally handicapped. Thus, although each deaf-blind client in the project will receive certain services within the framework of specialization, e.g., training in communication, his training in most instances will be conducted in an atmosphere in which blind persons with normal hearing also participate. The IHB has already had a satisfactory experience in structuring services in this way.

5. The Total Team Approach

Although certain IHB staff members will be officially assigned to the project, the entire IHB personnel structure will constitute a rehabilitation team for deaf-blind persons. The specialists will include members of the following disciplines: general medicine, ophthalmology, otology, psychiatry, administration, clinical psychology, rehabilitation counseling, prevocational and vocational training, social casework, social group work, research, and community relations. Although this project staff will maintain primary responsibility for deaf-blind clients, all other IHB professional and other staff people will be expected to participate in, and contribute to, the program, whenever their services are needed by deaf-blind individuals.

In order to maximize the contributions of the non-specialists, selected IHB professional and other staff members will receive an organized course of training in service

to deaf-blind persons. In addition to a series of planned discussions, lectures, readings, and observations, they will be expected to participate in scheduled recreational activities with deaf-blind individuals. In this way, they will supplement their more abstract learnings with direct experience in practical situations with deaf-blind persons. This training has a number of interesting aspects which should be pointed out at this time:

a) It will generally be conducted on agency time.

b) It will include clerical and service personnel as well as professional workers.

c) It will feature "field work," providing contacts with deaf-blind persons as part of the training program.

d) Its impact upon staff attitudes toward, and activities in service to deaf-blind individuals will be evaluated by the research personnel attached to the project.

6. Community Education

Service to deaf-blind persons is suffering from a cultural lag in that we have the tools with which to rehabilitate many deaf-blind persons, but we lack the commitment to do the job. Through the IHB project, a concerted effort will be made to educate many communities about the potentialities of their deaf-blind citizens and to encourage them to organize themselves to assist them. Some of the community education efforts will be made by project team members serving deaf-blind persons. This will be done as they enter a community to study it prior to admitting a deaf-blind person into the project and, subsequently, when attempts are made to resettle the individual in his home town. Furthermore, the education of the community will be promoted indirectly as IHB staff members enter a state or a locality to prepare the professional workers for cooperation with the project. As these workers gain an understanding of deaf-blindness and a sense of faith in the capabilities of deaf-blind persons, they will dis-

seminate this information and faith to other professional personnel and to the lay community.

One of the most important community education provisions in the project will be that of assigning a deaf-blind community education counselor to visit various states and communities, underscoring not only through his words, but through his example, the potentialities of deaf-blind persons and how these potentialities can be developed through appropriate programming. This deaf-blind staff member is the holder of both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree obtained while he had neither vision nor hearing, and is an excellent public speaker. It is anticipated that his impact upon local and state audiences will be dramatic. He has already impressed tens of thousands of lay and professional people with his accomplishments and, as a result of his efforts in this project, a more favorable climate for deaf-blind persons will be created wherever he goes.

An additional aspect of the Community Education function of the project will be an effort to keep personnel of the American Foundation for the Blind informed about developments in the service so that they can interpret the program to others.

Summary

The Industrial Home for the Blind, in cooperation with the United States Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, has launched a demonstration and research project providing for the development of a regional rehabilitation service for deaf-blind persons. This project, encompassing some fifteen states from Maine to North Carolina, will offer a full range of rehabilitation services, incorporated insofar as possible, into the general agency program. Among the features of the service will be special efforts to: 1) organize the region, 2) organize the local community, 3) train state and local agency personnel, 4) reduce the isolation of deaf-blind persons, 5) employ a total team approach, and 6) educate local communities to the needs and potentialities of deaf-blind persons. From time to time, reports will be issued concerning progress made in the project and reflecting the results of research carried on in association with it.

NOTE: All referrals to the regional program should be made through the appropriate state agency for the blind.